

COMMON NAMES AND TAXONOMY¹

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Common names and taxonomy. That sounds almost like a paradox. The vulgar thoughts of the rabble and the profound cerebrations of the intellegentsia, but after all a name is a name, and, of course, the first names were vernacular.

Then scientific expediency led to a system of technical nomenclature so that order might be brought out of chaos. Thus we were to have for each organism a name universally used and recognized, which would indicate phyletic relationship. Undoubtedly Linneaus saw in his work the initiation of a stable system. It is well that we visit this world but once!

Of course, I am in sympathy with the rules of binomial nomenclature and believe that *nomina conservanda*, in taxonomy are diametrically opposed to the laws of priority and the principles of natural classification.

Therefore the vernacular name, despite its myriad colloquial modifications, remains our only hope for immediate stability. But even here we are beset with almost insurmountable difficulty: the roadside grasshopper on the Canadian Plains is *Camnula pellucida* and on the Atlantic seaboard it is *Schistocerca americana*. The cotton boll worm of Texas transforms into a corn ear worm in Iowa and into the tomato fruit worm in eastern Maryland. But we are becoming agreed that the yellow fever mosquito is that self-same insect which transmits yellow fever despite the dipterist's chameleon-like changes in which he one moment decides that it is *Stegomyia fasciata*, the next *Stegomyia calopus*, then quickly changes to *Aedes calopus*, *Aedes ægypti*, or *Aedes argenteus*.

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Even though the day should come when scientific refinement would make the determination of our commonest insect, in a technical sense, impossible to any but the specialist, house fly will be an excellent name to indicate that troublesome aggregate of dipterous insects that may or may not spread typhoid by walking on the butter.

For a time there was a tendency to foist upon the layman a modification of the technical name, as the Calosoma beetle, brown Anomala, and apple Bucculatrix. An excellent precedent was established for this procedure by the common names applied to many plants, as Geranium, Aster, Verbena, Petunia, Alyssum and many more. But botany is a much older science than entomology and I wonder if in many cases the taxonomic botanist, or herbalist, as he was then called, did not latinize the vernacular names rather than the layman adopt the technical terms. Be that as it may, we have not been nearly so successful with insect names of this type. Then there were the "gay nineties" of geographical names, New York weevil, San Jose scale, Mexican bean beetle, and what not, until a nation's ire was raised because it was being held responsible for so many "wee tim'rous beasties."

Descriptive names are ideal, but lead us into some very ridiculous complications. We have the brown horse louse. Is it a brown louse or a louse on brown horses? And even worse, the biting horse louse. Here evidently the louse infests biting horses. So we must change it around to the horse biting louse. Now we must be careful of the accent, for it we say *horse-biting* louse we can see this louse cavorting over the pasture snapping at the horses. We must pronounce it horse *biting-louse*. And there are the black cabbage beetle, green apple aphid and countless others.

"What should be the structure of a common name?" This was a question that concerned the Association for many years. Committees profoundly considered the academic use of the hyphen, of *ed*, and of *ous*, and delved into Shakespeare and Chaucer until the codification of common names was more involved than the most intricate mental gyrations of the International Commission. But the economic entomologist has a sense of humor and when the balloon got so large that it threatened to blot out the sun, he touched it with a

cigarette and Poof! it came to earth.

A common name is a common name and that is all. It is the vernacular name, the name of the people for a thing, in this case an insect.

How simple!

We have only to find out what all the common people everywhere call an insect and after that name write what all the taxonomists agree is the correct Latin name for the same insect, and thereafter all economic entomologists, who are neither common nor taxonomic or are both, as you choose, are constrained, never to depart from this combination; unless the Common Name Committee changes its mind or some taxonomist has the temerity to disagree with his colleagues.

But seriously, it is essential that in applied entomology we have a well established vernacular name for each pest that will be associated with it in the minds of those interested in the pest from some nonacademic viewpoint.

The layman will not even try to swallow *Leptinotarsa decimlineata*, nor can we foist upon him such pseudo-academic names as irrorate leafhopper. He does not know what irrorate means, and I venture to say that there may be some in this august gathering of mental collossi who do not know what that word means.

Even more reasonable common names have failed of popular adoption. Certainly Colorado potato beetle is a nice name. It sounds nice, the insect is a beetle, it feeds on potato and it first attracted attention in Colorado, so we adopted the name. And what then? Go over most of the country and you find that the Colorado potato beetle never even occurred there. No, their pest is the potato bug.

All the Association of Economic Entomologists hopes to accomplish by the activities of its Committee on Nomenclature is a reduction of vernacular names to a reasonable minimum for any given insect and to prevent the same common name from being applied to more than one kind of insect.

To achieve the last-mentioned object is not always possible. For example, what was the apple leafhopper a few years ago is now several species of Jassidæ, but a conscien-

tious effort and serious coöperation on the part of all entomological writers can do much.

We hope to prevent the repetition of such an embarrassing situation as developed in the case of the name Japanese beetle. Long before *Popillia japonica* attracted attention in this country, American entomologists in Hawaii had named *Adoretus umbrosus* the Japanese beetle and had built up a very considerable literature around the name. Now imagine what would be our confusion if *Adoretus umbrosus* should succeed in evading the vigilance of the Port Inspectors, should enter the United States and our Common Name Committee should be confronted with the necessity for deciding on a common name for the new pest. Should it be Hawaiian Japanese beetle? A very silly name! Or should it be the Japanese beetle from Hawaii? Even worse!

Today, if entomologists will use the available facilities, it is possible to ascertain very promptly whether or not a common name has been used previously.

The Committee on Nomenclature of the American Association of Economic Entomologists maintains and attempts to keep up to date a catalogue of all of the English names that have been suggested for insects. This list now includes the common names of 4,400 species of insects, not all American but each referred to in literature under an English common name. In a duplicate reference card index, these names are arranged in one case alphabetically according to the technical names and in the other case according to the common names. Of course some insects have many common names; in fact, our index has now 5,600 common names listed.

Of this vast number the Association has adopted and published preferred names for 625 species of American insects.

One of the present trends in this branch of nomenclature and one which I believe to be fully justified is to let nature take its course in naming insect pests. This is not always possible with newly introduced pests for which names must be promptly adopted for regulatory purposes. But in other cases it is far better to wait until the people have settled upon a name for a pest than to attempt to introduce a new

name. We can not introduce a new name in most cases despite our most serious efforts. For over a century a little gray neighbor of man had borne the dignified name of body louse, then the war threw us into the trenches and zowie! We came out with cooties! It is unfortunate that the economic entomologists did not have foresight enough to introduce all of our unnamed pests into "the big parade" so that each would have come out wearing an A. E. F. name as firmly fixed for distinguished service as cootie.

GEOTRUPES HORNI BLANCHARD

This is one of the common species of the genus in this locality occurring, according to my series, from August 8 to September 30. It can be easily distinguished from the other species by its pure black color with no metallic reflections. I have found it frequently under a fungus having an acrid milky juice (*Lactarius*, perhaps *piperatus*) and it often bores from the top down through the stem and into the ground to a depth of five or six inches; I have never noticed this particular mode of attack by *G. balyi* *Jek.* which at times frequents the same species of fungus. I have found an adult, a pupa and a larva beneath the same fungus though it is not certain they were all *horni*. Generally but one or two specimens are taken under one plant while *balyi* may occur in from two to six specimens. *Horni* occurs in rather dense growths of oak and I took several specimens in a pine grove at South Paris, Me., on September 20, 1928. It was taken at Monmouth, Me., on September 4 and 9, 1917, under fungi. A dead specimen was picked up on the sand area back of the beach at Surfside on Nantucket Island on September 13, 1928. The range of this species is much greater than formerly recorded as I have a specimen taken by Dr. T. H. Frison at Urbana, Illinois, bearing the unusual date of April 16, (1914).

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